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Manuals of Faith and Duty.

No. VI.

THE

BIRTH FROM ABOVE.

BY

REV. CHARLES FOLLEN LEE.

EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN AGAIN [OR FROM ABOVE] HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

JOHN iii. 3.

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O Source of uncreated light,
The Father's promised Paraclete!
Thrice holy fount, thrice holy fire,
Our hearts with heavenly love inspire;
Come, and Thy sacred unction bring
To sanctify us, while we sing.

Plenteous of grace, descend from high,
Rich in Thy seven-fold energy!
Thou strength of His Almighty hand,
Whose power does heaven and earth command;
Proceeding Spirit, our defence,
Who dost the gift of tongues dispense,
And crown'st Thy gift with eloquence,
. . . . . .
Make us eternal truths receive,
And practise all that we believe:
Give us Thyself, that we may see
The Father, and the Son by Thee.

From the VENI, CREATOR SPIRITUS, commonly ascribed to Gregory the Great. — *Dryden's Paraphrase.*

THE BIRTH FROM ABOVE.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE phrase "New Birth" is one with which the reader is doubtless familiar; for the subject to which it relates is one of the most important with which the Gospel deals, one that from the days of the Infant Church has called forth innumerable treatises and sermons, and consequently one upon which Christian conversation is very apt to turn. It was, then, both natural and desirable that this subject should be discussed in the series of manuals to which this little book belongs, and it is the writer's hope and prayer that what follows may be found useful by all who favor him with their attention.

It will no doubt be asked by some, "Why was not this manual entitled *The New Birth?*" The answer is, because *The Birth from Above*

was considered a more comprehensive and suggestive title. We have no quarrel with the phrase "New Birth," but we are satisfied that the one we shall substitute for it deserves the preference. In the Scriptural passage most often cited in connection with the subject of which we are to treat, it has the sanction of the original, as the marginal reading, both in the Common Version and in the Revision, bears witness; and we feel that upon due reflection our choice of a title will commend itself to all. Thus the Greek word rendered *again* in the Common Version and *anew* in the Revision, may, with equal correctness, be rendered *from above*.[1] The reader will perceive, then, that to say a man must be "born from above," if he would "see," or "enter into," the Kingdom of God, means, not only that he must be *born again* or *anew*, but that, as our Lord teaches, his re-birth involves heavenly agencies, or the operations of the Holy Spirit.

[1] John iii. 3, 7.

I. — Christ and Nicodemus. — A startling declaration.

Let us turn to one of the most impressive and fruitful chapters in the Evangelical Narratives, — that recording the conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus the Pharisee, "a ruler of the Jews," that is to say, a member of the Sanhedrim, or High Council of the Jewish nation.[1] It is night, an hour that the Pharisee may have chosen, not merely for prudential reasons, but also because it offers the most favorable opportunity for an interview with the "Teacher" whom he believes to have "come from God." The labors, heat, and turmoil of the day are over, and amid the ensuing calm and silence, so grateful to meditation, the body allows the soul to enjoy its sovereignty undisturbed. So, seated by the Master, a little apart, we may believe, from the disciples, Nicodemus opens a conversation that is to be handed down by Saint John through all succeeding time. Never has Nicodemus been so stirred; never has the solemn night awakened within him such searching questions; never has he been so mightily

[1] John iii. 1–21.

wrought upon by another; and bending his inquiring eye upon the majestic and yet sympathetic face before him, he says: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no one can do the miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

Thus the memorable conversation opens. Thus does the Pharisee broach a subject that doubtless of late has occupied a large share of his attention, his burning desire being to know more about this wonderful Person whose words and works are the theme upon which thousands of tongues are dwelling.

And what says the Master, this "Teacher come from God," as Nicodemus eagerly awaits His response? "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." A startling declaration truly, whether understood or not, to one who, like this Pharisee, is seeking to learn from the Great Teacher's own lips the secret of His power and the object of His labors among men. Nicodemus feels that Jesus has divined his thoughts, and that what has just been said must be preparatory to his enlightenment on the subject that is uppermost in his mind; and yet he

is puzzled to know what the Master means. What has one's being born again to do with the question, "Who is this Jesus of Nazareth, and what is he trying to do?" And then, too, how can one be born again? Surely he has not been asked to believe that a physical re-birth is possible. He is puzzled, we repeat, and at the same time startled. He has enough confidence in the wisdom of this Person to feel that He understands what He is saying, and that it is he, the questioner and would-be disciple, who is at fault; and yet these are strange words that he has heard. So he rejoins, and we may believe with mingled curiosity and timidity, "How can a man be born when he is old?" whereupon Jesus, who is preparing the Pharisee's mind for the reception of the great truth that He would have to take root in it, says, and even more impressively than ever, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst

not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus now partially understands the Master. A gleam of light flashes in upon him. What is meant is this: that he who would enter into and enjoy the privileges of the Kingdom of Heaven of which this new Teacher claims to be the Founder and Ruler must undergo an inward change through the operation of influences that may be fitly likened to the invisible movements of the wind. But still the Pharisee's mind is not clear. Why should he, a son of the Abrahamic Covenant, need a "new birth," or a "birth from above," to prepare him for citizenship in the Messiah's Kingdom? and then, what is it to be "born of the Spirit?" A gleam of light, as has been said, has flashed in upon him; but he is still far from being like one around whom shines the full-orbed radiance of day.

As it was with Nicodemus, so it has been with multitudes since his time; and so it is with multitudes now. Far better acquainted as the modern inquirer into Christianity may be than was that Jewish "doctor of the law" with the purpose that brought our Lord into

the world, the declaration made to the Pharisee may sound hardly less startling to him or her who for the first time seriously considers it. What does to be "born again" or "from above" mean? Is it a mere figure of speech, or is it symbolical of some high and solemn truth that must be mastered at any cost of mental effort? Such a questioner feels sure that, since it is Jesus Himself who declares this, it is not to be passed over as if, like so many declarations that one hears, it had no strong claim upon the attention. Coming from such a source, it must mean something, and, therefore, what does it mean? "How," as Nicodemus asked, "can these things be?"

II. — The Jewish Doctrine of the New Birth.

To answer the question, "How can these things be?" we need here to remember that our Lord invented no new phrase when He spoke of a man as undergoing a second birth. Nicodemus had often heard such a phrase. When a Gentile was converted to Judaism, it was said that he had been "born again" or "anew." He was received into the fold of

Israel by baptism as well as by the submission of himself to certain imperative requirements of the ceremonial law, — his baptism signifying the supposed washing of his soul to cleanse it from defilement.[1] Hence water was a most expressive symbol to the Jews of that day. Its use in the case of a proselyte was the sign of what was hoped to be an inward fact. John the Baptist caused his disciples to submit themselves to the rite,[2] and, although the Pharisees criticised him for so doing,[3] there was nothing about the rite itself that was difficult to understand. The difficulty was that a Jew should be asked to conform to it. And that was in part the difficulty with Nicodemus. Like his brother Pharisees, it seemed strange that, under

[1] "He (Nicodemus) inquired how the language of Jesus could be literally true, — not because he was ignorant of its usual figurative meaning, but because he could imagine no proper application of that meaning to the Jews. 'It may seem remarkable that Nicodemus understood our Saviour literally, when the expression *to be born again* was in common use among the Jews, to denote a change from Gentilism to Judaism by becoming a proselyte by *baptism*. The word with them meant a change from the state of a heathen to that of a Jew. But they never used it as applicable to *a Jew*, because they supposed that by his birth he was entitled to all the privileges of the people of God.' — *Barnes*." Paige's Comment. on John iii. 4.

[2] Matt. iii. 1–6.

[3] John i. 25.

any circumstances, Israelites should have to be baptized. But this was not the sole difficulty with him. The additional phrase, "of the Spirit," greatly perplexed this seeker after truth. He could not conceive what it meant, and he doubtless went away asking himself over and over again, "What is it to be 'born of the Spirit'?" Yet we may believe that he left the Saviour's presence with the leaven of new and quickening thoughts working in his mind. He was now, although in secret, a disciple of the Christ, — a learner, that is, in His school. For it will be remembered that he defended Jesus in the Sanhedrim when our Lord's enemies sought to have Him arrested,[1] and that, in company with Joseph of Arimathea, he provided interment for the Teacher whom he had come to honor and love.[2]

III. — The Holy Spirit.

Having seen what to be "born again" meant to the Jew, we are now prepared to consider what it means to the enlightened Christian, especially as it conveys to his mind the enkindling thought of Divine power co-operating

[1] John vii. 50–52. [2] John xix. 38–42.

with faith in the work of drawing men toward God. And, setting about this grateful task, it is obvious that the first thing to be done is to inquire into the meaning of the phrase so often met with in Scripture, — *the Spirit.*

Among the first words upon which the eye falls, as it turns to the opening chapter of Holy Writ, are these: "And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters;"[1] while, as we near the close of the Vision of St. John the Divine, we read, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come."[2] Between these two passages, the further and the hither shore, as it were, of the ocean of recorded Revelation, there are, in our English Version, few words of more frequent occurrence than "Spirit," "Holy Spirit," and "Holy Ghost." In the Hebrew the word thus rendered *Spirit* is *ruach*, *wind*. In the Greek, the primary signification is the same. The Greek for *Holy Spirit* and *Holy Ghost* is the same in each instance, for which reason the American members of the Revision Committee wished to have the phrase uniformly rendered Holy Spirit.

[1] Genesis i. 2. [2] Revelation xxii. 17.

Thus we are told that, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David,"[1] and that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul."[2] Thus the Psalmist sings, "Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the earth."[3] Thus, speaking of the "Rod" that shall come forth "out of the stem of Jesse," the greatest of the poet-seers declares that "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him."[4] Thus the Herald-Baptist, prophesying of the "One mightier" than himself who "cometh," says to the listening multitude, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."[5] Thus we read that at the baptism of Jesus "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him;" and thus our Lord, issuing His parting orders to His apostles, says, "Go ye therefore, and teach (make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."[6]

[1] 1 Samuel xvi. 13. [2] Ibid. 14. [3] Psalms civ. 30.
[4] Isaiah xi. 2. [5] Luke iii. 16, 22.
[6] Matthew xxviii. 19, 20.

Scripture abounds with passages like these, all of which point to the belief of the Hebrew and the Christian in a personal wisdom and power to which the name of Spirit, or to distinguish it from the spirit that dwells in man, the Holy Spirit, is reverently given.

There is, then, in the language of the Old Testament, a "Spirit of the Lord," or, in that of the New Testament, a "Holy Spirit;" and therefore every one that accepts the guidance of Scripture ought to be able to affirm with the oldest of the written creeds of Christendom, "I believe in the Holy Ghost."[1] Furthermore, whatever other teaching under this head such a person may feel compelled to reject, he or she, it seems to us, ought to be able to believe that the Holy Spirit is God at work in nature and the human soul, as a creative, sustaining, governing, enlightening, and regenerating Power. When the Psalmist, in the words just quoted, says, "Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created: and Thou renewest the face of the earth," he is thinking of God as the informing Life and Energy of Nature and her myriad creatures; and when the Apostle says, "The Spirit

[1] Vid. Apostles' Creed.

itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God," [1] he can mean nothing less than that God is present in the souls of himself and his brethren, and is speaking to them in a language that is not wholly unintelligible. Hence the phrase "Holy Spirit" is not a convenient rhetorical figure, but the symbol of an eternal Verity. When Scripture speaks of a "Spirit of the Lord" or of a "Holy Spirit," it means precisely what it says, — that there is such a Spirit, and that this Spirit is none other than God Himself, who is a Spirit,[2] presiding as a Spirit over the affairs of the physical world, and potently present in the soul of man, the greatest of His works.

Thus, to answer the question of Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" — how can one be "born again" or "from above?" — one must believe that there is a Holy Spirit to make such a re-birth possible. The same mode of reasoning that leads us to regard physical phenomena as the manifestation of a Higher Power impels us to attribute spiritual life in man to the same adorable Source. Everything, we say, is the product of some cause, and consequently if there

[1] Romans viii. 16. [2] John iv. 24.

is such a thing as spiritual life, it, as well as anything else, must have a cause. What, then, can that cause be but the Holy Spirit? What else can be adequate to its production? The Christian thinker rejoins, "Nothing," and so speaks of the Holy Spirit as the "Author and Giver of Life" in the highest and fullest sense in which the word "life" can be used.

IV. — Man a Moral Being.

But, as there can be no spiritual life without a Holy Spirit, so man can know nothing of such life unless he has a nature in which it can be developed. Accordingly, if we cannot believe that man is something more than so much finely organized matter, it is useless to discuss the possibility of a "birth from above." If he be nothing but a higher animal, the words of Jesus to Nicodemus deal with figments of the imagination and not with commanding facts, and serve only to illustrate one of a number of doctrines which, however venerable and however widely received, have no solid basis of truth.

We shall not attempt to prove that man is a moral being, but assume that he is one. The purpose of this treatise is not to combat unbe-

lief, but to exhibit a wholesome doctrine to those who profess to accept the teachings of Christ and His Apostles. Moreover, however strongly tempted we might be to enter into an argument with those who deny that man is a moral being, we should be withheld from so doing by the limited space at our disposal, which forbids us to do anything more than to present the doctrine of the "Birth from Above" as we understand it.

Christian philosophy is wont to recognize a threefold division in human nature, and hence speaks of man as having a *body*, a *soul*, and a *spirit*. This triple division of man occurs frequently in ancient authors.[1] The body is the animal part of us, and reminds us of our physical relationship to the brute creation. The soul is the intellectual and immortal principle within us, — that which in our eyes distinguishes us from an ox, a dog, or a bird. The spirit represents what is higher than the soul, as the soul does what is higher than the body, — the divinest fact about us, the entity by means of which we can commune with Him who made us, and of whom we speak as "the Father of

[1] See Krauth, "Vocabulary of Philosophy," p. 477.

spirits." The spirit may in truth be called the *soul* of the soul, and is that part of us that must be quickened and educated, if religious life, in the finer sense, is to be enjoyed by us. All men live in the body and the soul; but all men do not live in the spirit, at least consciously, and it is therefore to this kind of life that Jesus refers when He says, "Except a man be born again (or from above), he cannot see the Kingdom of God." This is what He means by "eternal life," and the potency of which He would impress upon us when He says, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."[1] Says the late Rev. F. W. Robertson, as he speaks of this threefold division of human nature, and expounds the words of St. Paul, "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:"[2] "The third division" — he has previously spoken of the other two — "the third division of which the apostle speaks, he calls the 'spirit;' and by the spirit he means that life in man which, in his natural state, is in such an embryo condition that it can scarcely

[1] John x. 10. [2] 1 Thessalonians v. 23.

be said to exist at all, — that which is called out into power and vitality by regeneration, the perfection of the powers of human nature. And you will observe, that is not merely the instinctive life, nor the intellectual life, nor the moral life, but it is principally our nobler affections, — that existence, that state of being which we call love." [1]

Hence, because man is a moral being and as such contains within him the generous possibilities of spiritual life, the Holy Spirit engages in no hopeless task in seeking to arouse him to a recognition of his higher duty as a rational creature. His spiritual nature may be steeped in drowsiness ; it may resemble that deadly condition known as *coma*, when the patient is wholly unconscious, and those about him almost despair of him ; but still there is a spiritual principle within him, and it is possible to arouse it into activity. There is something to work upon, and accordingly the Holy Spirit only attempts what has already been made possible in striving to quicken that something into consciousness, and cause it to play its proper part in the realm of higher life.

[1] Sermon iv. Third Series.

V. — The Kingdom of God.

At this point we need to inquire what is to be understood by that "Kingdom of God" which we are told that a man cannot "see" or "enter into," unless he be "born from above." The phrase "Kingdom of God," or its equivalent, "Kingdom of Heaven," is of frequent occurrence in Christian Scripture, and, though often misinterpreted, its meaning ought not to escape us. It is applied, on the one hand, to that Society which our Lord came into the world to establish, and to which we commonly give the name of Christian Church, and, on the other, to that reign of truth and righteousness on earth which the Church is designed to image forth and advance, and which the Saviour seeks to make universal through the acceptance of His Gospel. Thus He referred to the Church, or Divine organization of which He was the Head, when, commenting on the unwillingness of the young man who "had great possessions" to relinquish them all and follow Him, He said, "How hardly" — that is, with what difficulty — "shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," — become, that is, a

faithful and useful member of a society which, in that day, demanded a complete severance from all worldly ties and cares, that the work of the Gospel might be freely prosecuted.[1] Thus, again, Christ referred to His Church when, prophesying the acceptance of the Gospel by the Gentiles, He said: "And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God."[2] But in passages such as the following the phrase refers to the principles of the Gospel as they take up their abode in the human breast, and dominate the life. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;"[3] "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for behold, the Kingdom of God is within you;"[4] "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."[5] Here the spiritual side of the Divine Kingdom is dwelt upon, and we are asked to think of it more especially as embracing those

[1] Mark x. 23. Matt. xix. 23–24. [2] Luke xiii. 29.
[3] Matt. vi. 33. [4] Luke xvii. 20. [5] Romans xiv. 17.

whose hearts have been purified and exalted, and brought into loving communion with the Great Heart of the universe. It is what the Church of Christ, or visible Kingdom of God bears witness to, as it goes forth "conquering and to conquer," reminding us that God, by His Spirit, is at work among men, and is subduing them unto Himself.

In His conversation with Nicodemus, our Lord, we think, used in turn the phrase "Kingdom of God" in each of the senses that we have specified. When He said, "Except a man be born again" — or from above — "he cannot *see* the Kingdom of God," He referred, we conceive, to the Society which He was organizing, the existence of which, as a Divine fact, one who had not undergone a re-birth could not recognize, and into intellectual and spiritual sympathy with which he could not come; whereas, when He said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God," He seems to have been referring to His Church, as a visible institution, and to have been indicating what was necessary, if a man were to be admitted to its privileges, and be regarded a worthy partaker of them.

VI. — The Necessity of the Birth from Above.

We come now to the question of supreme importance in connection with the subject before us: Why must a man be born from above, if he would see and enter into the Kingdom of God? This question the Saviour answers thus: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit;" and then adds, "Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again."

"The natural man," says Saint Paul, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."[1] The "natural man" is the physical and social man, living wholly in the senses, or, if his mind be active, giving little or no thought to anything, save what is seen and felt. He has, as we have said, a moral nature, and that nature is capable of being spiritually quickened; but is dormant. It has not yet awakened to a realization of what to the religious person is a fact, — that there is a God, and a God who

[1] 1 Corinthians ii. 14.

asks His rational creatures to acknowledge His existence and obey Him. Such a man may, and probably will, admit that there is a Supreme Being; he may even call himself a Christian, for the name Christian is often most improperly appropriated and bestowed, — but he has no spiritual life. He "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," since he knows not what they are. "They are foolishness unto him." When he hears words like those spoken to Nicodemus, he marvels at them. He cannot imagine what they mean. The language of thoughtful Christians often sounds almost foreign to him. What are these "experiences" of which they speak? What are the "joys" about which they talk? When they thus converse, he feels as much out of place in their company as an unpoetic man would feel in the society of poets, or a man with no knowledge of, or natural taste for art, in the society of painters and sculptors. He may be wise enough to perceive that they are discoursing of realities of which he unfortunately knows nothing; but it is quite as likely that he will think that they are dealing in nonsense, and consequently that they have nothing whatever to teach him.

Hence the necessity that the "natural man" shall be born from above, if the "things of the Spirit" are not to remain "foolishness unto him." Not until he has himself undergone what Christian people have undergone will he understand and share their happiness. And particularly is this true with respect to what such people are in character, — that is, with respect to their devotion to Divine truth, to their unselfish love for what is pure and noble, and their willing labors in behalf of others. They will be more or less of an enigma to him, and he will be continually asking himself, "What is the secret of their conduct? Why do they feel what I do not feel, and do what I have no inclination to do?"

It cannot be denied that the majority of those about us are in the condition of the "natural man." They may be "very good people," as the saying goes, and have many admirable traits; but religion, as the Christian understands the term, is a mystery to them. The higher realm of faith, hope, and love is as far above that with which they are familiar as the mountains are above the plains that behold them from afar. Indeed, they are not aware

that there is such a realm. It is not only an unexplored, but an undiscovered country to them. They must be "born from above" before they can know anything about it. As it was necessary for them to be born in the flesh before they could have rational existence in the world of matter, and behold and rejoice in the beauty and glory of nature, so they must be born in the spirit before they can become conscious that there is a spiritual world, and one in which, as the children of the Everlasting Father, it is their high privilege to live. Well, then, might our blessed Lord say, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit;" and well might He add, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." No truth more solemn and sublime ever fell from His holy lips; and no one who has not mastered this truth has attained unto the higher summits of Christian thought and feeling, — in other words, of Christian life. This, we trust, is asserted in all humility, without any admixture of self-righteousness. Our reason for the assertion is a deep and settled conviction of what we regard as eternally true. "The natural man receiveth not the

things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." He must be "born again," or "from above," if he would "see" and "enter into," the Kingdom of God.

VII.—"How Can These Things Be?"

But still again, as Nicodemus would say, "How can these things be?" By what means can a man be "born from above"? An answer is found in the words, "Except a man be born of *water and of the Spirit*, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." Let us consider what this answer involves, and first, why our Lord should speak of *water*.

We have seen how, among the Jews, baptism by water signified a change of mind and heart, symbolizing the new relations in which the convert stood to God and to the body of believers with whom he had associated himself. He had become cleansed, it was hoped, from the sins, follies, and errors of the past, and had solemnly dedicated his life to the service of the Holy One of Israel. This ordinance Jesus retained, and with those who believe in Him as the

Christ its retention should be a sufficient reason why they should willingly submit to it, and in the manner prescribed by Him, when, sending forth His Apostles to the moral conquest of the world, He said, "Go ye therefore, and teach (make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."[1] Such was the command of Him whom we call "the Way and the Truth and the Life;" and whether one regard the use of water in baptism as a mere sign or symbol, or as something in itself efficacious, it is a command that should be loyally and lovingly obeyed.

It was impossible that our Lord should enjoin anything that was useless, — that he should require of His followers more than was right. There was a divine reason for everything He did, and He could have imposed no ordinance that was not in closest sympathy with the needs of them whom He had come to heal and to save. As in the Old Dispensation water had been the symbol of purification, so, and in a much larger and finer sense, it was to be in the New, becoming to the true believer the

[1] Matthew xxviii. 19.

"outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace."

Nor should we forget that our Lord Himself was baptized, at the hands of His great forerunner, the last of the Hebrew prophets.[1] Despite the expostulations of the Baptist, He requested this to be done, because He was man's immaculate Exemplar. Whatever else baptism meant in His case, it certainly meant that He asked no more of others than He was ready to do Himself; and he who acknowledges Jesus as his Teacher and Saviour should not refuse to follow Him in this. "The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord."[2]

But our Lord speaks of being "born of water and *of the Spirit.*" More than water is necessary if one is to be "born again," or regenerated. One's higher nature must be quickened and developed by power from above, if he is to become what the Apostle calls a "new creature (creation) in Christ."[3] Hence the need of the Holy Spirit, without whose aid regeneration is impossible. How this aid is rendered, what the process is by means of which a new life is born

[1] Matthew iii. 13–17. [2] Ibid. x 24.
[3] 2 Corinthians v. 17.

within us, we do not know. It is one of those mysteries that we strive in vain to comprehend. But its being a mystery is no reason why we should refuse to believe in it, any more than that we should believe in it simply because it is a mystery. It is enough that Christ teaches that there is a heavenly reality underlying it, and that we are able to recognize that reality in what is wrought out in ourselves and others. Light and heat are mysteries; and yet we know them to be facts. The operation of the Holy Spirit in man is impenetrably mysterious; and yet every one who is sensible of an indwelling grace through the visitation of the Spirit, and who beholds in fellow mortals the undeniable evidences of the same regenerating process, knows that, mysterious as that process is, it is a fact, and one of the most joyous and blessed facts that can fill the soul with awe and wonder, and inspire gratitude and praise.

Let no one, then, be repelled from the Scriptural doctrine of regeneration, because it involves a mystery, since such an objection holds equally good in the case of other doctrines set forth in Scripture, and reverently accepted by

our reason. We believe in God as an everlasting, self-existent personality, the Creator and Preserver of all things visible and invisible, in whom "we live and move and have our being;"[1] yet when are we confronted by so bewildering and overpowering a mystery as when we think of the Godhead, and try to conceive what it is like? We believe in Jesus the Christ, as the Son of God and the Son of Man, as one wholly without sin, the only perfect being who has ever trod the earth; and yet what a mystery we have in Him! Nay, what a standing marvel He is, even to them who deny His Divine origin and superhuman powers, and yet believe Him to be an historical personage. Theodore Parker said of our Lord: "I do not believe in the perfection of Jesus, that He had no faults of character, was never mistaken, never angry, never out of humor, never dejected, never despairing."[2] And yet this gifted iconoclast must have felt that there was such a mystery about Jesus as there was about no other person who has appeared in

[1] Acts xviii. 28.

[2] Selections from Theodore Parker's Unpublished Sermons, Eng. ed., 1865, p. 244.

the flesh, when he wrote the hymn beginning with, —

"O thou great Friend to all the sons of men."

and ending with this stanza: —

"Yes, thou art still the Life, thou art the Way,
The holiest know; Light, Life, the Way of heaven!
And they who dearest hope and deepest pray
Toil by the Light, Life, Way, which thou hast given."

So, too, we not only believe but know that there are such facts as the Universe and the life that we are living in it; and yet what mysteries rise up before us when we look around and within, and ask, "What mean these things?" There is not an object that greets the eye, be it a blade of grass, or a falling leaf, that does not enshrine wonders too deep for a Linnæus or a Newton.

"Flower in the crannied wall,"

muses Tennyson,

"I pluck you out of the crannies, —
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower; but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is."

Here, there, and everywhere do mysteries accost us, and therefore why should we refuse to

credit what Scripture teaches when it declares that, by a mysterious process that ever eludes our sight and touch, gifts are conferred upon us that make us the citizens of a spiritual kingdom, and the heirs of favors which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man"?[1]

VIII. — The Witness of the Spirit.

We may believe, then, on the authority of Scripture that there is such a thing as a "birth from above," endowing us with a life far different from that with which we enter the world. But there is still another reason why we may so believe, and that is supplied by what St. Paul calls "the witness of the Spirit,"[2] which he appeals to in support of his assertion that he and his fellow disciples are children of God, and to which we, convinced with him that there is such a witness, would also appeal.

What is this "witness" of which the Apostle speaks? It is, we conceive, —

1. First, an inward assurance that there is a God, who is ever with His creatures, and who, doing all things well, may be freely trusted, and

[1] 1 Corinthians ii. 9. [2] Romans viii. 16.

in the darkest and most trying hour. There is, of course, in the case of every thoughtful believer, an intellectual conviction of the truth of what Scripture affirms; but the assurance of which we speak is more than such a conviction. It is a strong, irrepressible feeling, which cannot be adequately defined, that, when one declares his faith in things unseen, he is standing on the solid ground of truth. Even though he be deficient in the logical faculty, and be easily tripped up by a dextrous antagonist, the feeling still remains that he is in the truth. His confidence in the correctness of his position does not depend upon syllogisms. He is satisfied that he should believe in God and His Providence, should he be worsted in every theological encounter, and though everything in nature and outward experience should seem to contradict his creed. With the long-suffering and unfaltering Job he exclaims, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!"[1] and with the steadfast Apostle he declares, "I know whom I have believed."[2]

Now this assurance of which we have spoken is a part of "the witness of the Spirit" that he

[1] Job xiii. 15. [2] Timothy i. 12.

who has been "born from above" is not under the spell of a fond delusion, but is believing in One who does exist, and who is worthy of his best service. It is not the result of an obstinate determination to believe, regardless of aught that may be urged to the contrary, nor is it the result of blind credulity. It is a spiritual experience of the truth, and as such is the Spirit's witness to the truth. It is not something that one secures by himself, but something that the Spirit confers. It belongs to that order of gifts of which Saint Paul speaks, when he says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."[1]

2. Again, "the witness of the Spirit," affirming the reality of a "birth from above," is afforded the faithful disciple in those moments when his thoughts and feelings are more than ordinarily elevated, when his inner outlook is fairer and more commanding, when a joy is his which he cannot translate into words, and a deep, ineffable content steals over him that banishes all fear and sorrow. It is not the mood of the warm enthusiast, who, easily wrought

[1] Galatians v. 22, 23.

upon, has become emotionally aroused, his eye, like the poet's,

"in a fine frenzy rolling."

It is a mood characterized by clear perception, calm reflection, and quiet gladness, that would be disturbed and broken up by noise and demonstration. It may be preceded by participation in some act of worship, in which one has been wholly absorbed, or it may follow in the train of an agonizing trial, when, for a time, his soul, like the Psalmist's, has been cast down, and he has cried, "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me!"[1] but whatever others might think and say, he knows what that experience is and what it means. God, by the Spirit, is speaking to him; he is favored with a foretaste, however small, of the joy and glory yet to come; "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"[2] is his; and he can no more doubt the report of his spiritual senses than he can doubt his own identity as a being clothed in flesh and blood. In a word, the "witness of the Spirit" is his, and so unmistakably, that he feels that it would be sinful not to acknowledge that blessed fact, and

[1] Psalms xlii. 7. [2] Phil. iv. 7.

meekly adore the One who has so graciously visited him.

3. Still further, the "witness of the Spirit," certifying to the truth of the doctrine that there is a life which is peculiarly "from above," is given in the walk and conversation of the thoughtful and earnest believer. Here again we are reminded of that "fruit of the Spirit," of which the Apostle speaks. Because a new life has been born within certain men, they are able to conform with something like fidelity to the law of the Gospel. They have not attained unto perfection, and in this world never can; but they are different men from what they once were, as all who are familiar with their antecedents can testify. A marked change has come over them. They have a strength they formerly sadly lacked with which to resist temptation, and to do the things that once were distasteful to them; and knowing this, we do not hesitate to say that in them we behold the ripening "fruit of the Spirit."

The wondrous transformation that was wrought in the first companions of Jesus may here be cited. When they went about proclaiming the Gospel, filled to overflowing with love for

God, and burning with love for fellow-mortals, they were far different men from what they were when they first left all to follow their Master. Look at Saint Peter. Outwardly it was the same Peter that preached in the streets of Jerusalem after the Day of Pentecost who, on the eve of the Crucifixion, thrice vehemently denied his Lord; but inwardly it was quite another person. Or look at Saint Paul. The Saul of Tarsus that consented unto Stephen's death, and went forth, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,"[1] was not, as his friends could affirm, the Paul that had embraced the cause of them whom he had persecuted, and, contrary to his old Jewish prejudices, preached salvation as well to the Gentile as to the Jew. Both of these Apostles showed by their conduct that they had been "born from above." In the change that had taken place in them, the Spirit bore glorious witness that the Gospel was in truth "the power of God unto salvation,"[2] to every one that believed.

As it was in the case of the Apostles, so it was in the case of the thousands who, through

[1] Acts ix. 1. [2] Romans i. 16.

their labors and the blessing of God, were gathered into the fold of Christ. One of the most remarkable facts connected with the progress of the new faith was the alteration that ensued in the lives of those who embraced it. The only charge against the early Christians that could be sustained, was that theirs was a *religio illicita*, — a religion, that is, not licensed by the State. The younger Pliny, when enforcing, as proconsul of Bithynia and Pontus, Trajan's edict against them, wrote to the Emperor saying that, after a careful investigation of their belief and practices, he could "discover nothing but a perverse and extravagant superstition." [1] By every fair-minded person it was admitted that, as a class, the Christians were a singularly worthy people, chaste and sober, honest and industrious, excellent neighbors and good citizens. And yet, if we are to believe Saint Paul, such had not been the character of many of them before their conversion. In his letter to the Ephesians, he says, "And you hath He (God) quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according

[1] Epistle x. 97.

to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."[1] And in his letter to the Colossians, the same Apostle writes: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked sometime, when ye lived in them."[2] These brethren of the various churches that Saint Paul had been privileged to organize were still fallible mortals; they still needed to be instructed, admonished, and exhorted; but they gave proof for the most part in their lives of the transforming might of the Spirit. There was a noticeable difference between what they were, as the professed disciples of Christ, and what they had been, when they had bowed before the altars of heathen divinities; and in that difference their loving

[1] Ephesians ii. 1–3. [2] Colossians iii. 5–7

father in the Gospel saw the "witness of the Spirit" to a fact that repaid him a thousand times over for all that he had done and suffered in the name of his Ascended Lord. Thinking of their liberation from what, referring to the debasing worship of heathen gods, Saint Augustine calls "the hellish thraldom of these unclean spirits," he could have said, had Christians been as numerous in his day, what the latter did three centuries later, — that none but "abandoned and ungrateful wretches" "could murmur that the masses flock to the churches and their chaste acts of worship; where a seemly separation of the sexes is observed; where they learn how they may so spend this earthly life as to merit a blessed eternity hereafter; where Holy Scripture and instruction in righteousness are proclaimed from a raised platform in presence of all, that both they who do the word may hear to their salvation, and they who do it not may hear to judgment. And though some enter who scoff at such precepts, all their petulance is either quenched by a sudden change, or is restrained through fear or shame. For no filthy and wicked action is there set forth to be gazed at or to be imitated; but either the precepts of

the true God are recommended, His miracles narrated, His gifts praised, or His benefits implored." [1]

And as it was in the days of the Apostles and their earlier successors, so it has been ever since. In every land where the Banner of the Cross has been unfurled, there have always been some to serve as living witnesses to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The teaching of Scripture under this head has been wondrously supplemented by the lives of true disciples, and thus all who have been willing to use their eyes and their reason have been given a most convincing proof of the truth of the Christian doctrine of regeneration.

What Scripture teaches, then, when it speaks of the "witness of the Spirit," is re-affirmed by experience. The believer's inward assurance of the truth of the Gospel, his moments of clearer spiritual insight and deeper tranquillity, and the difference between his life and that of the "natural man," all proclaim the presence within him of a Divine Guest, who, as the Son of Man was not ashamed to abide in the humblest Jewish home, is not ashamed to make an abode of

[1] De. Civ. Dei, ii. 28, Dod's translation, Edin. 1878.

any heart whose doors are thrown open in welcome.

IX. — Conversion and the Work of the Holy Spirit.

What we mean, when we speak of the "birth from above," or regeneration, we assume that the reader now understands. We are treating of life in the spirit, in contradistinction to life in the ordinary acceptation of the term, a life that finds its fullest earthly expression in an active faith in Jesus Christ as the Revealer of God to man, in conscious communion with the Maker and Father thus revealed, in joy in well-doing, and in glad anticipation of a time to come, when "this corruptible" shall "put on incorruption," and "this mortal" shall "put on immortality."[1] He whose regeneration is thus certified to himself and to his fellow believers is, to use the recent language of a well-known American writer on religious themes, "brought into loyal, filial relations to his Father. He receives, by the direct play of the higher divine nature on his own, a new and divine life, which translates and transforms him, raises him

[1] 1 Corinthians xv. 53.

from the dead, emancipates him from his old-time bondage unto sin, delivers him from all fear of future penalty, redeems him from all present destruction, and unites him in a living relation of love and sympathy to his God."[1] Such, as we interpret it, is the Scriptural doctrine of regeneration, without having mastered which much of the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles must be unintelligible to the student of the New Testament.

But now something should be said of conversion, both because of its relation to the general subject in hand, and because it is so often confounded with regeneration, or the "birth from above."

Conversion and regeneration are not, as many suppose, synonymous terms. The one is from the Latin *conversio*, a *turning around*, or *revolution*, the equivalent of which in Greek is *ἐπιστροφή*, and the other from the Latin *regeneratio*, *a being born again*, the Greek for which is *παλιγγενεσία*. And, not being synonymous, conversion and regeneration, as we should naturally infer, are not used synonymously in the New Testament. Whenever a change of opinion or

[1] Lyman Abbott, D.D

conduct is there referred to, it is spoken of as a *conversion*. Thus, for example, the Evangelical historian says of the missionaries Paul and Barnabas, as they wended their way to Jerusalem to consult the brethren there, "They passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles."[1] Thus, too, Christ, when explaining to His disciples why He speaks to the multitude in parables, applies to the latter the words of the prophet Isaiah, saying, "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."[2] On the other hand, the quickening within one of a life that means, not merely a change of opinion and conduct, but entrance into higher relations with God, and a participation, to a greater or less extent, in the privileges

[1] Acts xv. 3. This is the only place in the New Testament in which the word "conversion" is found.

[2] Matthew xiii. 15. The verb "to convert," in its various tenses, occurs also in the following passages: Mark iv. 12; Luke xxii. 32; John xii. 40; Acts xxviii. 27; James v. 19, 20. In Matthew xviii. 3, where Christ says, "Except ye be converted," etc., the Greek verb signifies only to turn.

of Christ's Kingdom, is spoken of under the figure of a re-birth, or re-creation, as in the general passage before us, and in Saint Paul's Epistle to Titus, where he says, "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."[1]

Bearing in mind, then, the distinction between conversion and regeneration, which, as we have seen, is one that the New Testament writers are very careful to make, we observe, —

1. First, that a converted man is not of necessity a regenerated man. After much mental travail, he may have come to believe in Christianity as a revelation from God, and to an appreciable extent his conduct may reflect his belief; but still it does not follow that he has been "born from above." The higher life may not yet have been generated within him, so that, to

[1] iii. 4–7. Vide also 1 Peter, i. 23.

use an expressive Pauline phrase, he may not, strictly speaking, be "a fellow citizen with the saints, and of the household of God." [1]

2. We observe, also, that a man may pass through a series of conversions, now embracing this system of belief, and now that, as his opinions happen to change. The average person may not fluctuate in this way; but such fluctuations are far from being rare. We have in mind one of the most original thinkers and vigorous philosophical writers our country has produced, who conspicuously illustrated the point in question.[2] In his nineteenth year he joined the Presbyterian denomination, but a few years later became a Universalist minister. Then he drifted into scepticism, and became a follower of Robert Owen, and of the equally erratic Frances, or Fanny, Wright. After a while he studied the works of William Ellery Channing, and for a time was settled over a Unitarian society in Boston. But he did not remain a Unitarian. Again taking up his nomadic march, he finally pitched his tent among the Roman Catholics, to be recognized at length as one of their strongest apologists, and the founder of a philo-

[1] Ephesians ii. 19. [2] The late Orestes A. Brownson.

sophical system that attracted so much attention, that he was invited to a chair in the Roman Catholic university at Dublin. Thus he underwent at least five distinct conversions, or turnings around, the last of which would seem to have been permanent, for he died in the communion of Rome years after his reception into it.

3. And, still again, we observe, that even one who has been regenerated may be converted, or turned around. For instance, without ceasing to be a believer in the Divine origin and mission of Christianity, his opinions on certain doctrinal points may undergo so great a change that he may feel compelled to leave one communion for another. Or he may fall from the faith altogether, his fall being accompanied by a moral lapse most sorrowful to contemplate; and then, in the end, he may be re-converted, and thenceforward live a most exemplary life. The fact that one has been regenerated makes such changes, as far as grievous errors and lapses from righteousness are concerned, less likely; but it does not make them impossible. For, while regeneration means the birth within one of a divine life, it is no guarantee that one's re-

ligious opinions will always remain the same, or that he will never succumb to temptation. He is still a fallible mortal, and therefore needs to pray for grace that he may keep in the way of truth, and hold fast to the faith, and resist the allurements of sin.

Conversion, then, is not the synonyme of regeneration, and hence the two terms should be used with discrimination. Conversion, we repeat, means a *turning around* of the mind or the heart, and regeneration, a *re-birth* or *re-creation.* Furthermore, as has been shown, one may be converted several times, and even after he has been regenerated. But how about regeneration? Is that a process that may be several times repeated? Not if we correctly apprehend its meaning. As one can be born only once in the flesh, so, we must think, he can be born only once in the spirit. The life with which he is thus royally endowed may suffer so much through neglect as to need revival and careful nursing to make it vigorous and fruitful; but this is not to say that one has been re-born of the Spirit. Such a birth has already taken place, and there is nothing to warrant belief that it ever occurs again. It is something that

has been done once and for all, and, having become an accomplished fact, the changes it may undergo for worse or for better indicate a decline in or a restoration to health. Thus regeneration means vastly more than conversion does, — entrance, in fine, into that eternal life of which our Lord so often speaks, a life in comparison with which that in the senses is as nothing, and without which the prospect of never-ending existence in the soul would be shorn of its fairest attractions.

Let no one infer, however, that we deny that the Holy Spirit ever has part in conversion. On the contrary, we rejoice in the belief that the grace and power of God are often signally revealed in the changes that men's opinions, feelings, and conduct undergo. As regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, so, too, a conversion of mind or heart may be, thus prophesying an approaching "birth from above," or witnessing to the loving desire of the Spirit that the life beginning with such a birth may not languish through disease.

X. — Illustrative Examples.

The story of Saul of Tarsus may be cited in illustration of the truth of which we speak; for if any event in New Testament history, after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, be entitled to belief, it is that of the conversion of this remarkable man, and in the manner narrated both by himself and the author of the Book of the Acts. In him we have one whose testimony in this relation is of the highest value. Well-educated, distinguished for common-sense and intellectual acumen and withal a man whose integrity will not be questioned, he may be accepted as a competent witness, and treated accordingly. And what does he say? That "after the most straitest sect" of the Jews, he had "lived a Pharisee," thinking that he "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," and laying a heavy hand upon the followers of the Crucified. Yet, going to Damascus, "with authority and commission from the chief priests," to harry the Christians there, he was suddenly arrested in his course, and changed from a persecutor into a believer, to become in time the ablest defender and exponent of the

Gospel that the Church of Christ has known.[1] Listen to his words to Agrippa: "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and

[1] Acts xxvi. 4–12.

throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."[1]

Here we have the story of a genuine conversion, of a complete *turning around*, which cannot be adequately accounted for on purely natural grounds, and which, both in what preceded and followed it, proclaims the power of the Spirit. It is difficult not to feel that the martyrdom of Saint Stephen, to which the proud Pharisee had been "consenting,"[2] made a profound impression upon him; and difficult, too, it is not to feel that during his journey to Damascus the remembrance of the martyr's words and bearing awakened many strange and troublous thoughts. He was bound for that city on a persecutor's errand; but the Holy Spirit was secretly guiding him thither, and was all the time preparing for the moment when the "light from heaven" should shine "round about him," and the reproving voice of the glorified Saviour should be heard. And the work of the Spirit may also be seen in what followed, when, arising from the earth, the bewildered man was

[1] Acts xxvi. 18–20. Cf. Acts ix. 1–22, xxii. 1–21.
[2] Ibid. viii. 1.

led by his amazed companions into the city. For "three days" he was "without sight, and neither did eat nor drink;"[1] during which time, we infer, he was gradually coming to himself, and made to realize what manner of man he had been, and what was thenceforth demanded of him. Then at last fully converted, his sight was restored, and admitted to baptism he stood forth among the rejoicing brethren, "a new creature [or creation] in Christ." In other words, he was now known to his new associates both as a convert to the Gospel and as a regenerated man, one who believed that Jesus was the Christ, and more than that, one in whose nature the love of the Saviour had taken root, causing him to feel that it was his bounden duty to give himself, body and soul, to the service of his Ascended Lord, and spread His truth among men.

Another striking illustration of the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion may be found in the life of the great Augustine, of Hippo. Born of a heathen father and a Christian mother, Augustine early displayed those intellectual gifts that were to make him the greatest thinker

[1] Acts ix. 9.

of his age, and one of the brightest lights that have adorned the Christian Church. But for years his life was irregular, and to the superficial observer it gave no promise of its future purification. Still, sinner though he was, he was supremely dissatisfied with himself, and was ever seeking peace. Manicheism, with its doctrine of warring Light and Darkness charmed him for a time; for it seemed to explain the conflict of good and evil that was ever going on within him. He was also attracted by the severe morality it professed, and would probably have closely identified himself with its fortunes, had he not discovered that it cloaked a most shameful hypocrisy. Repelled, then, from Manicheism, he took refuge in scepticism, until, going to Milan, he fell under the influence of the high-souled and eloquent Ambrose. Years before he had paid some attention to Scripture, and now, with much ardor, he again fell to studying it. But though he found the light he longed for, he could not obtain the mastery of himself, and his unhappiness daily increased. What should he do? What hope was there that he could ever triumph over the propensities that were continually leading

him astray? In great distress of soul, he one day sought the retirement of a garden, and, with his face streaming with tears, cast himself down under a fig-tree, and besought God for deliverance from the crushing burden of his sins. "How long? how long? 'To-morrow'?" he groaned, "why not now? why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness?" While thus storming Heaven with his heart-broken cries, he heard from "a neighboring house a voice, as of boy or girl . . . chanting, and oft repeating, 'Take up and read; take up and read.'" Believing that God had spoken through the child, he returned to the house where he had left his beloved friend Alypius, and opening at random the Scripture that he had shortly before laid aside, his eyes fell upon the words: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."[1] "No further would I read," he writes, "nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart,

[1] Rom. xiii. 13, 14.

all the darkness of doubt vanished away." Alypius, like Augustine, felt that God had spoken, and with joy they hurried off to acquaint the good Monica, Augustine's mother, who had long been praying for her son's conversion, with what had so wonderfully occurred. "And thou didst *convert her mourning into joy*," says Augustine. She, like him, felt that at last her prayers had been answered; and on Easter, the following year (387), the work that had caused Monica to leap and sing for gladness was consummated, as the humble penitent and happy convert, in company with his friend Alypius, and his son Adeodatus, were admitted to baptism by the godly Ambrose, and thus received into the visible fold of Christ.[1]

The story of the conversion of Col. James Gardiner, who fell, in 1745, at the battle of Preston Pans, is so remarkable that even the unbelieving reader must be struck with it. Gardiner, a Scottish gentleman of birth, who served with distinction for many years in the British army, was long noted for the dissoluteness of his life. He had been carefully edu-

[1] For Augustine's moving narrative of his conversion, see his "Confessions," bk. viii. §§ 28–30.

cated in the Christian religion by a pious and most excellent mother, and would seem to have been at times sadly conscious of his degradation. Dr. Doddridge, who relates his history in an interesting little book, much prized in the last century,[1] tells us that when, on a certain occasion, the Colonel was congratulated by some of his boon companions on the felicity that attended his courses, a dog coming into the room where they were, he "could not forbear groaning inwardly, and saying to himself, 'Oh, that I were that dog!'" Like Augustine, he felt that the heart of man was restless until it rested in God,[2] and wondered if he should ever be able to live in accordance with the law of Christ. One Sunday evening, in his thirty-second year, when about to commit a great sin, he chanced to take up a book that had been slipped into his portmanteau, entitled "The Christian Soldier, or Heaven taken by Storm,"[3]

[1] Some Remarkable Passages in the Life of the Hon. Col. James Gardiner, etc. First published in 1747.

[2] "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it reposes in Thee."

[3] The author of this book, Doddridge says, was Mr. Thomas Watson. He would seem to have been one of the Caroline divines who were ejected on St. Bartholomew's Day, 1662, for Nonconformity.

and, thinking to be amused, he opened it, and began carelessly to peruse it. Before long, however, "he thought he saw," says his biographer, "an unusual blaze of light fall on the book," and, "lifting up his eyes, he apprehended, to his extreme amazement, that there was before him, as it were, suspended in the air, a visible representation of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, surrounded on all sides with a glory; and was impressed, as if a voice, or something equivalent to a voice, had come to him to this effect, for he was not confident as to the very words, 'Oh, sinner! did I suffer this for thee, and are these the returns?'"[1] Overcome with awe, fear, and shame, the Colonel sank back in his chair and lapsed into insensibility; and when he recovered consciousness, the vision, if such it was, had vanished.

Now, whether we insist or not, as so many have naturally insisted, that the Colonel was under the spell of a powerful hallucination, there can be no doubt that he believed that he had been divinely called to repentance. And, vision or not, we do not doubt that he had been thus called. From that time forward

[1] Doddridge's Narrative, Amer. ed. 1795, pp. 42, 43.

he was a changed man. He abandoned his vicious ways, gave himself to the study and practice of religion, lived a most exemplary life, and fell in the battle aforesaid, lamented by friend and foe.[1] The Spirit, after years of striving with him, triumphed, and he was thoroughly converted from the sins that had so long held him in bondage. The life from above, which, doubtless, had been born within him while a child — for he had been given to the Lord in baptism and been bred a Christian — but which had been allowed to pine for want of food, was revived and reinvigorated, until it waxed strong and fair, and delighted all who could appreciate its manliness and beauty.

We cannot forbear offering still another illustration of the work of the Spirit in conversion. It is one that we owe to a friend in whose integrity we have perfect confidence, and who was himself the actor in the story we now relate.

Mr. G., as we shall call him, had been brought up religiously, and marrying the woman of his

[1] Any one curious to learn more about this remarkable conversion should consult notes 4 and 82 appended to Sir Walter Scott's novel of "Waverley."

love, who was in every way worthy of his affection, lived for some years an orderly and useful life. At length, however, he contracted an appetite for strong drink, which, though he never became a sot, slowly but steadily increased. The result was that he began to lose his self-respect, grew inattentive to his vocation, neglected his religious duties, and filled the heart of his devoted wife with grief and shame. The future looked very dark to her. What would become of the husband and the father, saying nothing about herself and her children, unless he soon conquered the pernicious habit that was obtaining so strong a hold upon him? But at length the succor she so earnestly desired and prayed for came. Late one afternoon, Mr. G. approached his home, so much under the influence of liquor as to be unsteady in his gait, and some boys who were playing with his little son before the door, noticing his condition, pointed their fingers at him, and tauntingly called their companion's attention to it. This the father remarked, and his soul sank within him. It had come to this, then! His weakness was exciting comment, and his innocent child must suffer on his account! Into the house he went, too much

ashamed to look the anxious wife in the face; and throughout the evening he sat by himself, moody and silent. He was thinking of his besetting sin, and asking himself how he could master it. In such a frame of mind he retired to rest; but no sleep bathed his eyes. Finally, arising and dressing himself, he went out into the garden and began to pray for help. For an hour or more, he said, he remained there pouring forth his penitence in prayer, and beseeching Heaven to free him from the chains of appetite. After a while peace came to him. A feeling that he could not describe took possession of him. Something seemed to say, "Your prayer is answered." As light of heart as a child, he sprang to his feet, and going to a corner of the garden where he had a bottle of liquor secreted, he drew it forth and held it in his hand. He had not the slightest desire to taste its contents. His love for drink had vanished, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye. "And I broke the bottle," he said, "and returned to the house another man; and from that hour I have not touched a drop of alcohol." It was some years after this incident when he narrated it to us. He was then an

esteemed member of the community in which he resided, a regular attendant at Holy Communion, and the efficient superintendent of a Sunday School. Through the power of the Spirit he had been won from a vice which had threatened to destroy him. So, at least, he believed, and so we have always believed. With the light of Scripture and Christian experience to guide us, we can in no other way interpret the change that our friend underwent.

After such testimony as the foregoing, we find it difficult to doubt that the agency of the Holy Spirit is often clearly recognizable in conversion. As in the first two instances, conversion may be preliminary to regeneration, — the one, in fact, following the other so rapidly as to seem almost concurrent with it, — or, as in the case of Col. Gardiner and Mr. G., conversion may mean a restoration to moral and spiritual health after a long illness, from which, for a time, there seemed to be little prospect of recovery.

XI. — The Secret Work of the Holy Spirit.

We have seen how the work of the Holy Spirit in man may often be traced with much definiteness. It should now, however, be remarked that in many and perhaps the large majority of cases, that work is done so secretly that one may be unconscious of what is going on within him. He may have no "experience," as some call it, to attest the fact that he has been "born from above," or that the life thus generated has been revived by fresh effusions of grace. All that he can say is, that he is not what he once was, — spiritually ignorant, or coldly indifferent to the truth, living wholly unto himself, or carelessly indulging in sins and vices that now he loathes and shuns. An undeniable change has gradually come over him, a change that causes him to glorify God, and consciousness of which incites him to apply himself with increasing diligence to the business of the disciple; but he is unable to tell us when that change began. "All that I know," he says, "is, that once I did not think enough about God to love Him, and that now

I do love Him, and with all my mind, and soul, and strength; that once Christ was nothing to me but an historical Personage, and that now I regard Him as the One 'altogether lovely;' that once, like the disciples of John the Baptist, I had 'not so much as heard whether there was any Holy Ghost,'[1] and that now I feel the presence of the Spirit in my heart, witnessing that I, too, am a child of God; and that, whereas once I cared chiefly for myself, and did much which to-day I recall with sorrow, now I have thought for my brethren everywhere, and am desirous of conforming my life to God's reasonable requirements." Shall we deny that such a person has been "born from above," when thus we have sufficient reason for believing that he has been so born? Why should we? He brings forth of the "fruit of the Spirit;" why, then, not admit that the Spirit has visited him, although in so quiet and secret a manner that we knew not that such a visit had been paid until the man's whole bearing and conduct began to proclaim that glorious fact?

Or take such a case as this: A man whose

[1] Acts xix. 2.

Christian faith and character are beyond question modestly assures us that he cannot remember the time when he did not in some fashion love God, Christ, and his fellow-men. "I was taken to the font in infancy," he says. "As soon as I could talk my mother taught me the Lord's Prayer. I was bred in the Church and Sunday School. I was told to 'abhor that which is evil,' and to 'cleave to that which is good.' I have never had serious doubts as to the existence of God or the truth of the Christian Revelation. I have ever delighted in attending Divine service, and have ever found pleasure and profit in reading Holy Scripture. Of course I have done wrong, for I am human. I am keenly conscious that I am not free from sin; and therefore I feel that there is large room for improvement in me. But, to be frank with you, I must admit that I have never experienced what some of my friends call 'conversion,' save that I have often been made deeply sensible of the wrongness of some act or state of feeling, and have heartily repented of it. If I have not been regenerated, then God grant that I soon may be! but I humbly trust that I have been, although I am by no means sat-

isfied with myself, and daily and nightly pray that I may grow in grace and in knowledge of the Lord." Now, what shall we say about a case like this, which we know is not an uncommon one? Shall we insist that such a man has not been "born from above," simply because the Spirit has never come to him in "demonstration" and in "power," but so quietly as to enter in without knocking, and to abide within a long time before the master of the house knew that a Heavenly Visitor was present? God forbid! We have what we must regard as an ample proof that this friend and brother has been "born from above;" and with that proof we should rest content.

Hence, to men like these of whom we have been speaking, we feel constrained to say, Do not be troubled because your religious experience has been different from that of many others. If you have been given to God in baptism, and have been steadily growing in the Christian life, be meekly thankful that such is the fact, and earnestly strive to increase in faith and righteousness. Beware of spiritual complacency; think not that you are what you should be, and with Divine help may become; but be not dis-

couraged and cast down because it has not been with you in spiritual things as it has been with some with whom you are wont to converse. The ways of the Spirit are diverse and manifold. No two Christian men have precisely the same experience to relate. If you have the witness of the Church that you have been "born of water," and the witness of the Spirit that you have been "born of the Spirit," what more can you ask or desire than that you may be given grace to improve God's highest gift, and do the works of obedient and loving disciples? Remarks the Rev. Frederick W. Robertson:[1] —

"Men of enthusiastic temperaments, chiefly men whose lives have been irregular, whose religion has come to them suddenly, interpreting all cases by their own experiences, have said that the exercise of God's Spirit is ever sudden and supernatural, and it has seemed to them that to try and bring up a child for God, in the way of education, is to bid defiance to that Spirit which is like the wind, 'blowing where it listeth,' and if a man cannot tell the day or hour when he was converted, to those persons he does not seem to be a Christian at all. He may be holy, humble, loving; but unless there is a visible manifestation of how and when he was changed, he must be still ranked as unre-

[1] Sermon xi. Fourth series.

generate. . . . In our life there is a time in which our spirit has gained the mastery over the flesh; it is not important to know when, but whether it has taken place."

XII. Times of Spiritual Awakening.

In treating of the work and ways of the Holy Spirit, it would be a grave omission to say nothing of what may be called times of spiritual awakening. That there have been times in the history of the Gospel, when the presence and power of the Spirit have been specially manifested, no thoughtful and believing student of that history will deny. We do not agree with many in their interpretation of certain accompaniments of some awakenings in modern times; where they are convinced that they behold the operations of the Spirit, we are equally convinced that we behold the workings of delusion, of unhealthy excitement, and occasionally, even of madness; yet none will assent more unhesitatingly than we to the proposition that not only has the Holy Spirit been present with Christ's people from the beginning, but that there have been times when that consoling and inspiring fact has been grandly demon-

strated to all who have had eyes with which to see, and ears with which to hear.

It was on the day of Pentecost, the day commemorated under the beautiful and expressive name of Whit-Sunday, or White Sunday, that the first outpouring of the Spirit on the Church occurred. Ten days had passed since the Lord Jesus had been received up into glory, and the disciples, having returned to Jerusalem, "were all with one accord in one place,"[1] waiting for the coming of the promised Paraclete, or Comforter. On the eve of His passion, the Master had said to His sorrowing companions: "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."[2] And the promise thus made had been repeated on the eve of Christ's ascension, when, knowing that their Lord was about to leave them, the disciples were wondering how

[1] Acts ii. 1.

[2] John xiv. 15–17. Vide ibid. v. 26, and xvi. 7–14.

they were to do their appointed work without the support of His visible presence, and the guidance of His audible voice. Then were they commanded not to "depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which," continued their Leader, "ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."[1]

Such were the time, place, and purpose of the disciples' meeting on the occasion referred to; and then and there it was that the promise given them was wondrously redeemed. "And suddenly," writes the Evangelical historian, "there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."[2] What followed needs hardly to be recounted. In response to the question, "What meaneth this?" and in refutation of the mocking assertion that the inspired speakers were "full of new

[1] Acts i. 4–5. [2] Ibid. ii. 2–4.

wine," Peter, as the spokesman of the Apostolic company, declared that the ancient prophecy had been fulfilled,[1] that "all the house of Israel" might "know assuredly," that God had made "that same Jesus," whom they had crucified, "both Lord and Christ."[2] The Comforter had come; the Holy Spirit was with Christ's people; and the word to all who acknowledged the Apostles as the duly commissioned servants of the crowned and exalted Saviour was, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."[3] The result was that "about three thousand souls"[4] were that day added to the infant Church, and the age-lasting campaign of the Kingdom of Light against the Kingdom of Darkness began with a great and most auspicious victory.

Special outpourings of the Spirit were vouchsafed the Apostolic Church from that time for-

[1] Joel ii. 28–32. [2] Acts ii. 14–37. [3] Ibid. 38, 39.
[4] Ibid. 41.

ward, confirming the teaching of her leaders, and renewing their strength and ardor for the mighty work in hand.[1] And without doubt, the same favors were repeatedly granted the successors of the Apostles. Says the learned Mosheim, writing of the rapid propagation of the Gospel in the second century: "The astonishing progress thus made by Christianity, and the uninterrupted series of victories which it obtained over the ancient superstitions, are attributed by the writers of those days, not so much to the zeal and diligence of those who, either in conformity to what they considered as a divine call, of their own accord assumed the office of teachers, or had else been regularly appointed thereto by the bishops, as to the irresistible operations of the Deity acting through them. For, according to these authors, so energetic and powerful was the operation of divine truth, that most frequently, upon its being simply propounded, without entering either into proofs or arguments, its effects on the hearers' minds were such that persons of every age, sex, and condition, became at once enamoured of its excellence, and eagerly rushed

[1] Acts iv. 31–33; viii. 14–17; x. 44–48; xi. 19–21.

forward to embrace it." And further on he says: "That this was the case, and that those gifts of the Holy Spirit which are commonly termed miraculous were liberally imparted by Heaven to numbers of the Christians, not only in this but likewise in the succeeding age, has, on the faith of the concurrent testimony of the ancient fathers, been hitherto universally credited throughout the Christian world."[1]

The testimony of the ecclesiastical chroniclers of the Dark Ages as to supernatural occurrences in the life of the Church is not, for reasons that need not be given, entitled to the same consideration as that of the fathers just referred to; and yet we cannot read what they have recorded concerning the progress of the Gospel without feeling that the power of the Spirit was signally displayed in the results of the consecrated labors of men like Columba, Augustine of Canterbury, and Paulinus; like Aidan and Cuthbert, Wilfrid and Boniface. Whatever errors of doctrine these devoted and untiring servants of Christ may be thought to have inculcated, it is difficult not to believe that the

[1] History of Christianity. Vidal and Murdock's Translation, N. Y. ed. 1854. Vol. i., pp. 277–279.

Spirit was with them, and that it was more by the power of the Spirit than by anything that they were able to say or do unaided, that they become the moral conquerors of vast multitudes of rude, benighted souls.

The era of the Reformation was one of breaking away and tearing down, of bitter contention and bloody strife, when some of the worst and most destructive passions burst into flame, when persecution and counter-persecution did their cruel work without mercy and without remorse, and in some quarters the wildest fanaticism raged; and yet even then did the Spirit of the Lord come down upon thousands, arousing them from their apathy and sloth, and causing them to repent and bring forth "fruits meet for repentance," enlightening their eyes, filling them with unwonted love for Christ and His truth, and so strengthening their hearts that many a formerly weak soul walked as serenely to the block or to the stake as to a festival. On no purely natural grounds can we account for the benign change that came over the thoughts and affections of so many in that age. Dark and forbidding as were the skies that then lowered over West-

ern Christendom, their gloom was ever and anon relieved by the regenerating fires of the Spirit, as they descended to renew the face of the earth. Even Rome, stoutly opposed as she was to those who had parted company with her, received something of the Divine effusion, and stirred and energized by it, became more active in good works than she had been for centuries. By all discerning souls it was felt that the Spirit had again been poured out upon a sinful world, causing a weary winter to give way to a glad, prophetic spring, and re-certifying far and wide that the Gospel was "the power of God unto salvation." [1]

Hardly second in importance to the Reformation, as far as English-speaking peoples are concerned, was that revival of the last century which did so much to infuse new life and energy into the English Church and the various bodies that had separated from her. Who that believes in the living God revealed in Jesus Christ can long doubt that both they who adopted the name of *Methodist*, bestowed upon them in derision, and they who preferred that of *Evangelical*, and, unlike the majority

[1] Rom. i. 16.

of the first-mentioned school, continued to remain within the Mother Church, were incited to their truly Christian labors by the same Spirit that wrought so marvellously at Pentecost? As we study the literature of that period, we note much that we cannot attribute to a Divine source; the progress of the revival was often marked by an intemperance of enthusiasm offensive alike to reason and sober piety; but if the Holy Spirit has ever been manifested since Apostolic times, it was when Wesley and Whitefield, Romaine and Newton, were devoting themselves and all their powers to their sacred calling as ministers of Christ. One hundred and fifty years have flown since that famous awakening began; and its influence is still felt throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. What the result would have been had it never occurred can only be conjectured; but it may be safely affirmed that it was the beginning of a new era both for the Church of England and the communions born of her, and one that declares, as plainly as does anything in modern history, that Christianity is of God and that supernatural forces are ever at work for the regeneration of mankind.

As long as sin and unbelief remain, so long there will be periods resembling those that we have been reviewing. The Spirit never sleeps, and often, when we least suspect it, is secretly accomplishing the most important and enduring results; yet this does not render seasons of special manifestation less necessary. Not only does the Church need at times to be thoroughly aroused, that she may the more thoroughly cooperate with the unseen laborers with her, but the attention of the worldly and the scornful needs to be suddenly and sharply arrested by the play of forces such as no self-sufficient scepticism and no sullen and dogmatic materialism can explain away. As the Day of Pentecost was needed to proclaim to all who saw and heard its wonders that God still lived and reigned, so similar outpourings are needed to declare the same uplifting fact, meeting the haughty challenge of unbelief, "Where is thy God?"[1] and gladdening the hearts of the faithful with the assurance that they are not less highly favored than were their fathers before them. Hence the reader can understand why we confidently look for the coming of another season

[1] Psalm xlii. 3.

of spiritual awakening. Unless we strangely misinterpret the signs of the times, such a season is rapidly approaching, and is even near our doors. That it will be attended by errors and extravagances of which the thoughtful and the quietly devout will not approve is altogether probable; that methods will be resorted to which will work more mischief than benefit is to be expected; but the Church, at least in many quarters, will be revived, and clothed afresh with strength and courage. May the communion to which we belong partake of the blessings of the coming awakening. It will not be necessary to adopt measures and practices that our sense of right and fitness moves us to avoid; but we should welcome the Spirit in the day of visitation, and help all we can to add new territory to the visible Kingdom of our Lord. Alas for us if we elect to do otherwise! Such a choice will show that we do not care to have part in the work of subduing the world unto Christ; and to our denomination, as to the Babylonian King, the stern announcement will be made: THOU ART WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES, AND ART FOUND WANTING![1]

[1] Dan. v. 27.

XIII. — Privileges of the Life from Above.

Returning from what some may have regarded as a digression from the main subject, let us reflect upon the privileges of those who have been "born from above." For, while the Spirit is no respecter of persons, but visits the lowly as gladly as the lofty, and the unlettered as willingly as the learned, certain privileges are conferred upon the regenerate that cannot be too highly prized.

1. Foremost among the privileges of which we speak is the communion of the Spirit. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost," says Saint Paul to his brethren of the Church at Corinth, "be with you all."[1] What is this communion? The answer to the question has been in part anticipated by what we have said of the inward witness that the Spirit bears to the reality of the life from above, and by our remarks on the nature of regeneration.[2] The communion of the Spirit is precisely what, believing in a Holy Spirit,

[1] 2 Cor. xiii. 14. [2] Vide p. 52 *et seq.*, and p. 64 *et seq.*

we should suppose it to be, — fellowship with that Spirit, conscious relations with the Author of spiritual life, sweet intercourse with One who does not disdain to be the constant Friend and Helper of the poorest of His children. And what rarer privilege can there be than this? What would be confidential intercourse with the greatest monarch, or the mightiest genius, the world has ever seen, compared with daily and nightly communion with Him who made us, and who, by His Spirit, lovingly draws nigh unto the soul that filially draws nigh unto Him? Such is one of the privileges of him who has been "born from above." Not only does he spiritually know that there is a God, but he feels that he is in the immediate presence of Him before whom, as they behold the uncreated glory with which He clothes Himself, archangels bow their faces in humblest adoration. Nor is this all. He is permitted to address this Being, with the assurance that not so much as a sigh escapes him that is not heard by an all-sympathetic Ear, to be answered by a Voice whose slightest accents flood the chambers of the soul with music. He does not boast himself of the favors thus vouchsafed him, nor

does he presume to think that he has been preferred before his fellows, and endowed with a knowledge and a power that they can never share. He feels only this: that he has experienced for himself the meaning of the phrase, "the communion of the Spirit," and that it symbolizes blessings that human language can never express. His feeling, in fine, is that of the Mediæval writer, who has enriched religious literature with one of the noblest productions that ever came from an uninspired pen, and who says: "A man whose soul is united to Christ in fervent love, and who hath freed himself from passions and worldly solicitudes, this man, I say, is as it were spiritualized, can have recourse to God without distraction, lives in a manner by and within himself, — nay, is raised above himself, and enjoys heaven while yet upon earth."[1]

2. Another privilege of one who has been "born from above," is active citizenship in the Kingdom of God. He knows that there is such a kingdom, and that as a Christian he is identified with its affairs. He is a member of a

[1] De Imitatione Christi. Stanhope's Translation. Lond. 1809. p. 76.

Divine Society which includes the innumerable throngs who have worn, or still wear, the garments of mortality, and who, united to Christ, are striving for the redemption of the race, — "the glorious company of the Apostles," "the goodly fellowship of the Prophets," "the noble army of Martyrs," and "the Holy Church throughout all the world." He may be well-nigh penniless, and so obscure, that, should he die to-morrow, not a score of persons would miss him from the streets; but still, as a citizen of the Heavenly Kingdom, his rank is the highest known to earth. Princes and nobles cannot take precedence of him in this respect. When he approaches the altar of Christ he is on an equality with any one who may appear before it. He is more than a member of this or that nation, — he belongs as well to a nation embracing men of every clime and race. Wherever the Cross has been planted fellow-citizens of his are gathered. The language that he hears may be unintelligible to him; they with whom he mingles may differ from him in color, dress, and manners; but if they be in the true sense *Christians*, they are his brethren, members of the same Kingdom, being of "the household

of God."[1] Some spots are naturally dearer to him than others; his native or adopted flag has claims upon him that he does not wish to disallow; but, spiritually speaking, wherever the Church of Christ is found, there is his motherland, and wherever the truths of the Gospel are set forth, there he is at home.

This, then, is the Kingdom of which he who has been "born from above" is privileged to call himself a citizen; and in the saving work of this Kingdom he is privileged to share. Humble as may be his calling, and ordinary as may be his mental attainments, he, too, can do, and is doing, something to hasten the coming of the age when God shall be "all in all."[2] He is a soldier, enlisted under the lordliest banner that is kissed by the winds of morning. The most illustrious victories that history records have, with the help of God, been achieved by those who have rallied around that banner. The Captain of the host in which he marches knows his name, and prizes his obedience. Some day he must fall in the fight, and another will take his place; but the holy war will still be prosecuted, and he, though in a higher way,

[1] Eph. ii. 19. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 28.

will continue to have part in it, until, as a glorified spirit, he beholds it brought to a triumphant conclusion, and "at the name of Jesus" every knee is bowed, "of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth," and every tongue confesses that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."[1]

3. We have suggested still another privilege of one who has been "born from above," when we think of the power of spiritual perception he enjoys, especially if he has prayerfully developed the gift of God. Many may excel him in this respect; yet in comparison with him thousands upon thousands are blind.

(1) In the first place, one who is spiritually active divines more accurately than he otherwise would the essential meaning of Scripture. He is not an infallible interpreter; but radiance streams out from many a passage that formerly was darkness to him. At least this is true of him unless he be naturally deficient in power of reflection. Not only do the mountain peaks of Revelation stand out more clearly against the background of eternity, but valleys, where once he saw only deepening shadows, grow lighter to

[1] Phil. ii. 10, 11.

his searching eye. For this reason, much as he may be wanting in scholarship, he may, for practical purposes, be a better exegete than many a man that might be named, who, with all the knowledge and discipline obtainable in celebrated schools, has given years to the study of the Word. Let him only be assured that he has before him an approximately correct translation of the Sacred Text, after the latter has undergone a careful recension, and, possessing common-sense and a fair acquaintance with Scripture as a whole, he will be a more reliable guide for the ignorant through Biblical realms than scores of mere scholars who, however large their learning, are spiritually short-sighted. For spiritual short-sightedness is one of the chief obstacles in the way of Scriptural interpretation. "Spiritual things," be it again remembered, must be "spiritually discerned."[1] The books of the Bible are more than so much literature; they are the records of a progressive Revelation, and as such, with respect to their profounder teachings, they need to be studied by minds that have been spiritually illumined.

(2) As it is with such a man with respect to

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

Scripture, so it is with respect to Nature. To him Nature is not what she is to so many, — a beautiful but dark enigma. There is a great deal about her that he would not think of trying to fathom; she does much that seems inconsistent with his unshaken belief in Eternal Goodness; but she does not appall and terrify him, as she would did he regard her with the eye of the materialist. She is not a huge, soulless machine, governed by a black-browed, inexorable Fate, but the handiwork of the God and Father of Jesus Christ, who "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."[1] He is sure that, could he only read the Symbolic Word lying open before him as successfully as he does the Written Word, nothing would be disclosed that would be contrary to Scripture. And one great reason why he is so sure on this point is that his faculty of spiritual perception enables him to detect in Nature the action and interaction of Divine Forces that sing her Blessed Author's praise. He sees in her the operations of a Being to whom she owes all her power, grandeur, and beauty. Benevolence, as

[1] Matt. v. 45.

well as wisdom and might, informs her. If he set himself against her, she will sternly rebuke and punish him, and even though he be innocent of any designs against her peace, she may suddenly and most unexpectedly visit him and his with pain and death; but while he cannot explain many of her dealings with man, he is confident, from what is revealed to him, that all that she does is well done. The higher interests of mankind are in some way, however mysteriously, subserved; and he is willing to bow his head in the presence of the Infinite Perfection, and patiently await the hour when God will justify Himself to His creatures, and show them that they never erred in calling Him their Father.

It is true that, to hold rational communion with God in Nature, one must have something of "the vision and the faculty divine" of which Wordsworth speaks; but it is equally true that, combined with this "vision" and "faculty," there must be the spiritual perception of him who has been "born from above." Had it not been for such perception, which marks the difference between the *Excursion* and *Queen Mab*, Wordsworth would not have been a better interpreter

of Nature than Shelley, and hence could never have witten lines like these: —

> . . . "I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains, and of all that we behold
> From this green earth; of all the mighty world
> Of eye and ear, — both what they half create,
> And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
> In nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being." [1]

The closing words of the late Canon Mozley's remarkable sermon on *Nature* may be appropriately quoted in connection with these immortal lines. Having spoken of "the great atheistic poets," and shown how idolatry of the outward world "spoiled these men for the inward," until "in anger they fell back upon a Manichean

[1] Tintern Abbey.

God, who was lovely in nature and unjust in man," this writer truly says: —

"When men have started from outward nature, when they have used it as a foundation, and made it their first stay, its glory has thus issued in gloom and despondency; but to those who have first made the knowledge of themselves and their own souls their care, it has ever turned to light and hope. They have read in Nature an augury and a presage; they have found in it a language and a revelation; and they have caught in it signs and intimations of Him who has clothed Himself with it as with a garment, who has robed Himself with its honor and majesty, has decked Himself with its light, and who created it as an expression and manifestation of Himself."[1]

(3) Through spiritual perception one may also find a revelation of God in History. In the careers of nations, the slow but steady unfoldings of humanity, the march of great ideas, and the triumph of great principles, he may discern the guiding and saving Hand of the omnipotent King of kings. Instead of being but little more than the record of brutal and destructive wars, of greedy ambition and shameful oppression, of opposing jealousies, hatreds, and lusts, together with maddened attempts of suffering masses to

[1] University Sermons, fourth ed. N. Y. p. 144.

throw off galling yokes and avenge themselves upon their tormentors, history to such a person, if he make it a study, will proclaim the invisible presence of God with men, correcting their mistakes, bringing their follies to naught, causing their wrath to praise Him, supplementing the endeavors of the wise and the righteous, and thus ever leading His children on to higher and better things. Here, then, as in Nature, light shines out of darkness and beneficent purpose is seen. Man has not been left to his own devices, is not the sport and prey of blind and merciless Chance, but God's own child, whom He would save from ignorance and sin, and crown with undying favor.

(4) Once more. To one who has been spiritually enlightened through having been "born from above," life becomes fuller of significance the more that it is studied. The utility of much that men unavoidably undergo in the journey from the cradle to the grave is not perfectly plain to him; but he sees enough to convince him that life, as far as its divine side is concerned, is what it should be, and is fraught with richest purpose. Thus with the Apostle he can say, "Though our outward man perish,

yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."[1] Experiences of his own, the blessedness of which he once could not comprehend, now so plainly declare the Divine Wisdom, that he rejoices where first he could only sigh or weep; and, girded with new hope and courage, he runs with cheerful patience the race that is set before him![2]

Such are the privileges of the life "from above;" and he that enjoys them may, like Israel of old, be called a prince with God.[3] Higher privileges than his are unknown to earth; for higher can belong only to saints in Paradise, or to the Angelic company.

XIV. — Growth in the Life from Above.

Merely to be regenerated, or "born from above," is not enough; for, as we have elsewhere observed, one's regeneration is no guarantee that he will remain in a state of spiritual health and promise. The life thus conferred upon him must be carefully nourished and

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17. [2] Heb. xii. 1.
[3] Gen xxxii. 28.

tended, or he will not grow up into a vigorous and well-proportioned Christian manhood. Hence, as our little book draws nigh its close, we are reminded of the necessity of saying something on growth in the life "from above."

To "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,"[1] as an Apostle phrases it, one's inner life must therefore be fed and educated. For instance, he must freely avail himself of the instrumentalities provided for spiritual nurture in the rites and ordinances of the Church. He should be a regular attendant upon Divine service, a thoughtful listener when Holy Scripture is read, and an habitual and reverent student of it. He should frequently present himself at Holy Communion, and gratefully partake of the meat and drink there spread before him in the name of Redeeming Love. So, too, he should engage in domestic devotions. He should not think that he can discharge all his religious duties by appearing in the House of Prayer on stated occasions, and remaining silent before God at other times. If there be a family altar beneath the roof that shelters him,

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 18.

—and what home can afford to be without one? —he should daily worship at that altar, and thus prepare himself for any trial of his faith or manhood that may be at hand. And, furthermore, he should have his seasons of private worship. Wherever he may chance to be, — in the solitude of his chamber, or in the very thick of the world's affairs, — he should often turn to the "Father of Lights" to laud His numberless mercies, and beseech anew His guidance. A practice like this, when engaged in, not perfunctorily, but with true devoutness, cannot do otherwise than develop spiritual life, and impart to it individuality and tone.

Much to be commended, it may here be observed, is the habit of quietly meditating on Divine themes, such as the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, His glory in the heavens and the earth, and His unerring providence, both as regards the race at large and one's own self. Especially should the life and character of Him in whom God so adorably reveals Himself be raptly dwelt upon. To think of Christ as He is portrayed in the Gospel biographies, admiring His matchless excellencies, and trying to love what He loves, is sure to make us more

like Him, and thus to speed the accomplishment of His good work in us. As "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," by other than whom "no man cometh unto the Father," [1] He sets a pattern for our imitation, daily contemplating the incomparable beauty of which we may hope to come at last, "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." [2]

Much to be commended, also, is the frequent and intelligent use of devotional works that guide the thoughts of the spiritually minded, and enable them to find utterance for much that they feel, and yet cannot always satisfactorily express. Books such as the "Imitation of Christ," or Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living," and "Holy Dying," even though one be not altogether in doctrinal sympathy with them, may be of immense benefit in spiritual culture, supplying as they do the food on which multitudes have been generously nourished, and affording additional evidence of the ability of the Christian Revelation to do for man what he cannot do for himself.

[1] John xiv. 6. [2] Eph. iv. 13.

But to "grow in grace," hand in hand with piety of thought and observance must go practical piety of life. The truths and precepts of the Gospel must be applied to every-day affairs. Not only must one feel that he should love his brother, but he must love him, and do the works of love. It is a significant fact that they who are the most generous and sympathetic, who are most helpful to others, and who take the greatest interest in philanthropic undertakings, are, for the most part, men and women who both possess and, in largest measure, enjoy the life that is "from above." That life broadens and deepens through glad compliance with the Saviour's gentle commands. The more that the happiness of others is taken into its account, the more its own happiness increases. The more that it touches the inner lives of others, and lives with and for them, the more its sources of supply are multiplied. It is like a river that, fed by an unfailing fountain-head, receives, in the course of its seaward journey, the waters of an hundred tributary streams. Promising as it is to-day, it will be more promising to-morrow, and the more that it develops, the more it resembles that Perfect Life which is the "Light of Men."[1]

[1] John i. 4.

Thus a man is "born from above" that the new life with which he is endowed may steadily unfold its powers. That life does not at once attain unto its fullest possible proportions. Saintliness is not an instantaneous gift, but the result of orderly processes.[1] Again do we say that, like physical life, spiritual life must be nourished and trained. It cannot grow without food nor thrive without exercise. Dangers ever beset it, and it is only by watchfulness and culture that it can become "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season."[2]

Conclusion.

Much more might be said of the life "from above," and of the truths and duties that it

[1] "A man cannot, after a state of sin, be instantly a saint; the work of heaven is not done by a flash of lightning, or a dash of affectionate rain, or a few tears of relenting pity. Remember that God sent you into the world for religion; we are but to pass through our pleasant fields or our hard labors, but to lodge a little while in our fair palaces or our meaner cottages, but to bait in the way at our full tables or with our spare diet; but then only man does his proper employment when he prays, and does charity, and mortifies his unruly appetites, and restrains his violent passions, and becomes like to God, and imitates his holy Son, and writes after the copies of apostles and saints."—*Jeremy Taylor.*

[2] Psa. i. 3.

involves; but our limits forbid. Invoking, then, the blessing of God upon these pages, and praying that any errors they may contain may at once be rendered nugatory by that Spirit without whose aid man's best efforts would prove unavailing, we conclude with a few thoughts that at this time particularly entreat our attention.

The life "from above" is the only life that can forever satisfy beings who have been created in the image of their Maker, and endowed with immortality. "It is the true life of humanity, the life that it has in the Christ, — the real head of the human race; *the first Adam is of the earth earthy: the second Adam is the Lord from heaven.*"[1] Neither life in the body nor life in the soul, as the seat of consciousness and reason, is an end in itself. It was for life in the spirit, or eternal life, that we were called into existence, that we might know God and love Him, and loving Him, serve Him forever. As long, then, as one fails to appreciate this truth, so long does he miss the primal purpose of his creation, and live as it were in the ante-room of his Father's house, instead of passing within

[1] Mulford, "Republic of God," p. 235.

to take up his abode in the fair chambers prepared for him from the beginning. Life in the senses may please him for a time, and much more, for a time, may he find pleasure in a life that is largely intellectual; but these modes of life do not contain within themselves the springs of abiding peace and joy. The one grows wearisome at last, until it may breed unutterable loathing; while the other, baffled in its endeavors to pierce the mysteries of the universe, unless it submit to be guided by a wisdom that is not born of earth, falls a prey to restlessness and doubt, if not to deep despair. It is only of the life "from above" that man can never tire. For this life he was made, and apart from it he can never know true freedom and happiness.

Nor should we fail duly to value the thought that in the life "from above" we have the "potency and promise" of heavenly activity, knowledge, and joy. It is a verification of the truth of our dear Lord's saying, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life,"[1] and likewise an assurance that,

[1] John v. 24.

though we are still pilgrims on earth, something of the bliss of departed saints is already ours. And feeling that immortality in the higher sense is a present possession, and that we have an earnest of heavenly blessings, we are further made to feel that nothing but the necessary limitations of the present prevents us from rejoicing in spiritual sights and sounds, which, could we see and hear as do they who have gone before us into glory, would ravish us with ecstasy. Speaking of the organs of physical sense, a scientist has recently said that "there may be fifty other senses as different from ours as sound is from sight," and that "even within the boundaries of our own senses there may be endless sounds which we cannot hear, and colors as different as red from green, of which we have no conception." Hence he argues that "the familiar world which surrounds us may be a totally different place" to the members of the animal kingdom. "To them," he continues, "it may be full of music which we cannot hear, of color which we cannot see, of sensations of which we cannot conceive."[1] Very much so, we think, it must be with that other world

[1] Lubbock, "Popular Science Monthly."

which environs us, and to which the imperishable part of us belongs. What we now behold and hear by means of our spiritual faculties is prophetic of the surprises that will burst upon us, when we shall be wholly "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." [1] All around us smiles an incorporeal beauty the like of which we have never seen; and all around us breathes a richer moral music than has ever swept the chords of our inner being. With reason may we boast that we have only begun to taste "the goodness of the Lord" in the true "land of the living." [2] The best of everything that enlightened creatures can desire is still before us; and the devout imagination can never lack for food upon which to feed its hunger.

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." [3] Realizing who we are, how royally we have been favored, and how grand a future is beckoning to us from afar, let us strive, with the help of Heaven, to grow in the life "from above," ever "looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising

[1] Rom. viii. 21. [2] Psa. xxvii. 13. [3] Gal. v. 25.

the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."[1]

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE LOVE OF GOD, AND THE COMMUNION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BE WITH US ALL, EVERMORE. *Amen.*

[1] Heb. xii. 2.

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